

PASTORAL PAPER: Passive Endorsement

Passive Endorsement:
You're leading whether you like it or not
By Jeffrey L. Whittaker

I still remember the night I was watching the sports report on the evening news when a famous NBA star, known as a “bad boy” who was constantly the focus of controversy both on and off the basketball court, cried out in protest during an interview: “I am not a role model!”! However, it didn’t take very long at all for that same television network to splash this same player’s image all over the screen in an advertisement for a popular athletic shoe. Posters, T-shirts, replica jerseys and so on, all traded on the influence of this professional bad boy, while he cashed the royalty checks that came rolling in from his endorsement. Little Johnny (wearing all the official gear and even haircut of his idol) learns that a star player can storm off the floor at any moment, misbehave in public, swear at authority figures, etc., and still eat the fruits of stardom. These individuals profit from their endorsements, but do not want the responsibility that comes along with it. Unfortunately, this phenomenon has also appeared within “Christendom” as well. There has been an absolute orgy of endorsement and free association within the “Christian” worlds of publishing, speaking, and mass media. What has become normative however, is that whenever a question is raised about the content of an author’s writings or the comments of a public speaker, the authority (denominational leadership, television host, etc.) simply shrugs and announces, “Our organization has no official connection with the author/speaker/singer”, thereby hoping to escape any responsibility for their association. It is my conviction that this “Passive Endorsement” (the giving of credibility through sharing convention platforms, book endorsements, ecumenical “unity coalitions”, etc) is doing much to confuse grass roots Christian Believers, as well as creating an atmosphere where many historical heresies are being given a fresh hearing due to the lack of discernment, as well as courage amongst leaders who should be doing something about it. I will refer often to the anointed example of our Lord’s Disciples as witnessed in the Book of Acts as they encountered a variety of beliefs and superstitions across the world of their time. I will attempt to demonstrate how committed they were to preserving the clarity and truth of Christ, while calling all other cultures and religions to repentance from their empty belief systems, and to complete devotion to the one true God.

A Scripture comes to mind that demonstrates the great pains that were taken by the Apostles to present the Good News while denouncing anything or anyone who threatened its purity and simplicity. Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2:

1 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.

The highlighted phrase contains the essence of the problem with “Passive Endorsement”. Paul knew that it was vital to preserve the spiritual purity of the Thessalonian Church. Therefore he officially denounced the damaging doctrine and would not allow a false teacher to defraud the Church by claiming Paul’s direct authorship of it, nor his approval of the same. In fact, there is an entire body of non-Biblical literature known as the Pseudepigrapha. This was a collection of writings, all produced under the assumed names of the Apostles and other notable figures. The unscrupulous authors hoped that their deception would gain them a hearing due to the fame of the assumed name placed upon it. That is, once again, why we read Paul’s strongly worded warning to the Thessalonians with regards to a false doctrine being attributed to him. Today, Apostolic plagiarism is not so much a threat, but misplaced credibility due to the careless endorsements by trusted figures has never been stronger. The question I want to address in this article is when we will finally stand up and debate many of these positions of famous churchmen, and even be willing to restrict his or her access to our pulpits, because they hold doctrinal positions that are not damnable per se; but are very detrimental to orthodox belief and practice.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ issues a very specific and absolute call for loyalty and worship to the entire human race, leaving no room for compromise or double-minded passivity. In his powerful letter, Jude exhorted the church to “... contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (v.3).” If current Christian leaders do not have the stomach to take an absolute and public stand for foundational doctrine and orthodoxy, we will see a continued degradation of truth that will eventually deposit the “post-modern/emergent” church in the landfill of history or in the trophy case of hell (if you’re still “Old School” enough to believe that there is such a place). “Passive Endorsement” finds its roots in the political fear of men, wrapped in a false doctrine of tolerance that has permeated every area of American culture, as well as many churches and denominations. To take a stand for historic, Scriptural orthodoxy today is tantamount to professional suicide in many circles, labeling the one who dares ask questions as “closed-minded”, “contentious”, “fault-finding”, and so on. As in the favorite children’s fable, the emperor keeps parading himself around naked while the townspeople simply smile and go along with the farce. It takes a simple child, one without fear or ambition, to finally blurt out the truth that “the Emperor has no clothes!” May we all be as simple and courageous as that young lad as we speak the truth in love to our “unity at all cost” generation. We will now examine the unwavering example of Christ’s inspired Apostles, contrasting it to the waffling rhetoric of today’s churchmen.

“BUT WE HAVE SO MUCH IN COMMON....”

The scene is the city of Philippi. Our heroes are following the leadership of a Spirit-inspired vision given to the Apostle Paul of a “Macedonian Man” who pled with the team to “come over and help”. In verses 16-23 of chapter 16 we read,

“16 Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. 17 This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, “These men are the servants of the Most-High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.”

We are confronted here with the crux of the entire question facing today’s Christians and their leaders. How should Paul react to this encounter? Should he make the most of this “connection” with a member of the local community? Should he capitalize on this opportunity to create consensus and build bridges of mutual toleration, diversity, and understanding? After all, the fortune teller’s statements were accurate and could benefit Paul’s cause by attracting “seekers” that could attend his lectures and come to some sort of belief in Jesus. As one reads the record of ministry contained in the Book of Acts, it becomes quickly evident that conflict and persecution always followed the preaching of the true Gospel. The abandonment of Christ’s exclusive claims in favor of universal brotherhood and visible unity is the foundational error from which all the modern “heresies of relevance” spring! The Holy Spirit, speaking through Paul in Romans 1:16 states, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” In Acts 4:12 Peter proclaims: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” These inspired words have given believers of all ages a clear understanding that our Gospel (to all ages and cultures) is one of submission to Christ Jesus as the one and only Savior of the human race.

Therefore, we reason that if the Acts 16 passage had ended in verse 17 with the fortune teller’s declaration that “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation”; we may be justly tempted to ambivalence as to how we should relate to our non-Christian neighbors. But praise be to God, He has given us a crystal clear example through the courageous actions of Paul and his party of witnesses.

18 And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” And he came out that very hour. 19 But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to the authorities. 20 And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, “These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; 21 “and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe.” 22 Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. 23 And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely.”

Paul was “greatly annoyed” at the fact that a woman who was locally famous for her occult powers of divination had also given an endorsement to the Gospel of Christ and His messengers. Please allow me to restate that for many modern (and post-modern) leaders, any endorsement is considered a good one, and they are more than happy to share their platforms with other gods who flatter the Lord Jesus as a teacher, revolutionary leader, moralist, etc. To the first-century Christians however, this “flattery” was an insult and considered intolerable! The confrontation that followed in Philippi led to the deliverance of the dear woman from demonic oppression, but also led to a violent backlash against those narrow-minded bigots who demanded absolute devotion to their “god”, Jesus Christ!

We see the antithesis of Paul’s Scriptural position expressed by emergent church leader and author Brian McLaren.

“In an age of global terrorism and rising religious conflict, it is significant to note that all Muslims regard Jesus as a great prophet, that many Hindus are willing to consider Jesus as a legitimate manifestation of the divine... many Buddhists see Jesus as one of humanity’s most enlightened people, and that Jesus himself was a Jew, and (this book asserts) without understanding his Jewishness, one doesn’t understand Jesus. A shared reappraisal of Jesus’ message could provide a unique space or common ground for urgently needed religious dialogue—and it doesn’t seem an exaggeration to say that the future of our planet may depend on such dialogue.” (The Secret Message of Jesus. W Publishing Group, 2000. p.7)

In an interview with Leif Hansen, the transcript of which is available at www.understandthetimes.org/mclarentrans.shtml, McLaren makes some other rather provocative statements that should give the serious Christian pause:

Hansen: They (traditional Christians) want to know that there’s going to be some kind of, so to speak, hell to pay. Some sort of judgment. I think part of the problem that you and I both react to is that an infinite amount of punishment for a finite being and a finite amount of sin, there’s something that seems to question God’s just and loving nature.

McLaren: Yeah, it’s very true. And I think that creates a rational problem. And is that rationally sensible? Would it be—Does it make sense for a good being to create creatures who will experience infinite torture, infinite time, infinite—you know, never be numbed in their consciousness? I mean, how would you even create a universe where that sort of thing could happen? It just sounds—it really raises some questions about the goodness of God. And that, to me, is the deepest issue. You know, John said in First John, God is light and in God there is no darkness at all. And I—what I have to believe is that very few of us actually believe that. We all have the suspicion that there is a dark side to God. And that God isn’t truly, truly good. And I’m sure there’s all kinds of psycho pathology in that and everything else for all of us. But I think this is, in large part, why, what is so wonderful and magnetic about Jesus, is that Jesus, I think, reveals to us a God who is all light and there is no darkness at all there.

Hansen: I see that, too, Brian. But I can’t remember if I’ve mentioned this in the letter that I sent you. But there are some places where

either I need that hermeneutic of love as I'm reading him (John). Or His editors screwed up what he said. Or something. But there is a few places. The one that always comes to my mind as an example is where he uses imagery that feels and sounds sort of violent and dark. And to me, sort of threatening. Even though it's a parable, the example would be the servants that get cut up into tiny pieces. I'm like, what the hell is with that Jesus? Why? If you want me to have a sense that you and that God can be trusted and ultimately care for me, I know it can hurt following you also. But why would you use an image like that?

McLaren: Let's use that example. Can we talk about that for a couple minutes? Because, first of all, wouldn't that be great for a biblical literalist to be as literal about that as they want to be about some of the other parables Jesus told. So that we have the picture now, not only are you in literal flame, but you are cut up into pieces. So there's however many pieces of you. I guess it's sort of a, yeah, it's a shish-kabob, exactly. So I think and we're laughing. These things shouldn't be laughed about. But, you know, I just think that's a great example of how we have this selective literalism that's just so stunning.

Later on in the interview he goes on to say:

Hansen: But again, I don't mean to be a pain in the ass. But does the explosion come from God or does it come from God knowing how humanity, how we will reap what we sow?

McLaren: This is, one of the huge problems is the traditional understanding of hell. Because if the cross is in line with Jesus' teaching then—I won't say, the only, and I certainly won't say even the primary—but a primary meaning of the cross is that the kingdom of God doesn't come like the kingdoms of this world, by inflicting violence and coercing people. But that the kingdom of God comes through suffering and willing, voluntary sacrifice. But in an ironic way, the doctrine of hell basically says, no, that that's not really true. That in the end, God gets His way through coercion and violence and intimidation and domination, just like every other kingdom does.

The cross isn't the center then. The cross is almost a distraction and false advertising for God.

Hansen: Oh, Brian, that was just so beautifully said. I was tempted to get on my soap box there and you know—Because as you and I know there are so many illustrations and examples that you could give that show why the traditional view of hell completely falls in the face of—it's just antithetical to the cross. But the way you put it there, I love that. It's false advertising. And here, Jesus is saying, turn the other cheek. Love your enemy. Forgive seven times seventy. Return violence with self-sacrificial love. But if we believe the traditional view of hell, it's like, well, do that for a short amount of time. Because eventually, God's going to get them.

McLaren: Yeah. And I heard one well-known Christian leader, who—I won't mention his name, just to protect his reputation. Cause some people would use this against him. But I heard him say it like this: The traditional understanding says that God asks of us something that God is incapable of Himself. God asks us to forgive people. But God is incapable of forgiving. God can't forgive unless He punishes somebody in place of the person He was going to forgive. God doesn't say things to you—Forgive your wife, and then go kick the dog to vent your anger. God asks you to actually forgive.... And there's a certain sense that, a common understanding of the atonement presents a God who is incapable of forgiving. Unless He kicks somebody else.

Do you understand, dear reader, why we must be vigilant when it comes to "Passively Endorsing" these individuals by citing their writings and speeches as authoritative and worthy of emulation? Do you mean to tell me that there are no Scripturally orthodox brothers in the world planting churches in the power of Jesus' name and the glory of the Cross? I must say that I sympathize with McLaren's statement that "the future of our planet may depend on such dialogue" with the groups he mentioned, but I completely disagree with his conclusions. According to the Bible we are commissioned to share with every people group the Good News that Christ is Lord and Savior of all men who put their faith in His substitutionary death, burial, resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-4.). Scriptural doctrine deals a death blow to McLaren's universalistic, humanist message. Another prominent name within the postmodern/emergent camp is that of Leonard Sweet. In his book Quantum Spirituality he states:

"A quantum spirituality challenges the church to bear its past and to dare its future by sticking its big TOE into the time and place of the present. ... Then, and only then, will a New Light movement of 'world-making' faith have helped to create the world that is to, and may yet, be. Then, and only then, will earthlings have uncovered the meaning... of the last words poet/activist/contemplative/bridge between East and West Thomas Merton uttered: "We are already one. But we imagine that we are not. And what we have to recover is our original unity." (page 10)

In another statement from page 236 of the same work he writes:

The only thing that enters this planet from the outside, besides meteoric dust, is light. Light is our only energy, our only information. Leadership toward the light is the heart of what it means to be New Light. In one medieval manuscript, Ring of Fire, the trinity is defined as a community of light: God is sun, Jesus is Light, and the Holy Spirit is Warmth. A surprisingly central feature of all the world's religions is the language of light in communicating the divine and symbolizing the union of the human with the divine: Muhammed's light-filled cave, Moses' burning bush, Paul's blinding light, Fox's "inner light," Krishna's Lord of Light, Bohme's light-filled cobbler shop, Plotinus' fire experiences, Bodhisattvas with the flow of Kundalini's fire erupting from their fontanelles, and so on.

It doesn't take much of a stretch of the imagination to see how McLaren or Sweet would have dealt with the Philippian fortune teller. They would have sat down over a cappuccino and "dialogued" with her, exploring their common ground and respecting the native integrity of her beliefs based upon the "flickers of the sacred" that burned in her tribal religious culture.

I am not advocating crusade/inquisition hate speech that alienates true spiritual pilgrims, but what I am calling for is a deeper examination of the true nature of the courage and strength that led the Apostles to call all men to the true Gospel of Christ without obstruction and confusion! If Paul would have "Passively Endorsed" the Philippian oracle through non-confrontation, he would have most certainly left a syncretistic swamp from which the church may have never escaped. I am thankful that he took the appropriate stand and

saw a mighty Church Body birthed in Macedonia as a result. A Church that still lives on as an example of passion for Christ and His true Gospel!

You may be asking, “Brother Jeff, what in the world does Brian McLaren and Leonard Sweet have to do with you... aren’t you Assemblies of God?” The answer to your question is that neither one of these men are Assemblies of God credential holders nor personal acquaintances of mine. McLaren and Sweet have nothing to do with me or my denomination, at least on the surface. I would not even be writing this paper right now if these figures had not been introduced to me through the sermons, seminars, and articles of my own leaders. In the paragraphs that follow I will demonstrate the insidious nature of “Passive Endorsement” (PE for short), as well as the effect it can have on an individual, a local church, or an entire movement if left unchallenged.

Surely not here....

Am I being unreasonable? Surely there are no cases such as the one recounted in Acts 16 taking place in our enlightened time are there? I wish the answer to that question were no. Today we usually see examples of “PE” in the classrooms of seminaries, on the speaker lists of denominational conventions and ecumenical conferences, as well as on the endorsement pages of “Christian books”. Let us take a closer look at just a few such cases.

The first instance I want to address can be found in a sermon recorded on www.agsermons.org preached by our wonderful “Revival Time” evangelist, Dan Betzer. In the body of his message preached at an AG leadership conference, he began to extol the virtues of Dr. Tony Campolo and how this “radical” professor, author, and speaker was invited to a lunch with leaders from the city of Philadelphia that included representatives of the homosexual community, Planned Parenthood, etc. At one point during the lunch, Betzer states that Campolo posed two word association questions to the group. “What do you think when I say Jesus Christ?” To this they answered, “The greatest moralist that ever lived”, “No one ever lived like he did”, and so on. Then he said, “What do you think of when I say Christian?” The response to this question was an eruption of profanity and hatred. I was expecting Brother Betzer to give a Scriptural explanation of why the world hates the church for standing for truth or something along those lines. Instead, this seasoned and respected Assemblies of God Executive Presbyter said, “Something is horribly wrong when the world loves our Lord but hates His Church!” I agree wholeheartedly given the proper context. If Betzer would have used the example of people standing outside of funeral homes with “God hates Fags” banners I would have run to his side instantly. However, he offered no Scriptural explanation; only an emotional diatribe that did nothing to address the truth taught to us by Christ that, “If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first” (John 15). Could there be another reason for Tony Campolo’s position? If you turn to page 203 of Adventures in Missing the Point co-authored by Mr. Campolo and partner Brian McLaren (now you know why I mentioned him earlier), you will find that they are both inclined to believe that there is a biological predisposition to homosexuality (based solely upon shaky “pseudo-science”), and that ordination of these individuals is right and even desirable. Campolo writes:

“I frankly believe that at the present time nobody knows what creates homosexual orientations. All the evidence points away from simple, single-cause explanations. But one thing seems clear to me: homosexual orientations are not chosen.”

In his concluding arguments on page 210 of the same book, he arrives at the “logical” conclusion that his skewed line of reasoning demands.

“There must be good news for homosexuals. In the likelihood that their sexual orientations will not change, we must do more than simply bid them to be celibate: we must find ways for them to have fulfilling, loving experiences so that their humanity is affirmed and their participation in the body of Christ is ensured”.

There is a place for homosexuals in the Body of Christ! If there is room for me, then there is room for them, because my sins are no more repulsive than theirs!

The door of entry into Christ’s Church is painted red with the blood of the Lamb of God, and all who turn away from their sin and embrace His substitutionary sacrifice are welcome to enter! If you would like to hear samples of both Campolo and McLaren’s sermons at the “Open Door Community Church” located in the suburbs of Little Rock, Arkansas, a gathering that is led by a homosexual couple, you can do so by visiting their website www.sherwoodopendoor.org. Campolo’s dear wife Peggy goes so far as to say that married homosexuals should be allowed to lead the church while actively living in their Scripturally condemned lifestyle (December 2006 Arkansas Gazette article).

Let me say once more that Campolo and McLaren’s views are not my concern beyond common Christian charity. My main contention is how the “PEs” of figures such as these by our respected leaders are affecting the Assemblies of God fellowship! Does Brother Betzer believe that homosexuality is acceptable in the ministry (or is to even be named amongst believers except as a prayer request)? What about other local leaders who are slowly being influenced to accept certain opinions and trends as normal due to the lack of open discussion and debate of the issues; based solely upon the “PE” of a respected figure who doesn’t contradict or qualify what they say? I could even give some sympathetic latitude to Dan Betzer if he would have employed the technique of “qualified endorsement”. He could have said, for instance:

“You all know my friend Tony Campolo. We’ve been friends and colleagues for many years now and I have grown to love and appreciate

him. To say that he's a radical would be an understatement! In fact, he holds some positions that I just can't stand in agreement with. Though he believes that homosexuality may be biologically preordained and that they should be admitted to ordained ministry, (both of these questions being beyond my ability to accept) I admire his drive and desire to see all men come to Christ. Recently in a luncheon with community leaders in Philadelphia, PA... etc"

The audience could have then made their own conclusions about Brother Betzer's relationship to his friend by saying, "I can understand his dilemma. He wants to remain friends with his long-time colleague while disagreeing on principle with his positions".

If I as the pastor of a local Assembly had a guest speaker who made such outrageous statements, I can tell you what my Council of Elders would be saying. "How did this man ever make it to our platform?" "Didn't you do any research about him before inviting him to speak?" I wouldn't be able to simply "play dumb" and hope that the issue would just go away without anyone asking me about it. We leaders have all been given the terrifying responsibility of caring for Christians who have been entrusted into our hands, and we will appear before God's judgment throne to give an account for their souls!

The next example I would like to discuss took place at the 2006 Michigan District Council of the Assemblies of God. One of our special guests was Dr. Leith Anderson, pastor of "Wooddale Church" in Minneapolis, MN, and the acting head of the National Association of Evangelicals. During Dr. Anderson's Thursday morning home missions sermon he made two comments of note.

First of all, he asked the ministers when the last time was that they attended a catholic mass or had lunch or dinner with a priest. He offered no qualifying statements to this remark, leaving me (and many others who later telephoned and e-mailed me) to wonder what he meant by this, and what he was hoping to accomplish.

The second statement had to do with his Minneapolis church's plan to start a new congregation in the southern part of the city amongst the "politically liberal, upwardly mobile, and homosexual/lesbian" community. As with his prior statement, he offered no explanation whatsoever that would give context and perspective to the audience. Instead, his ambiguous and ill-defined words just hung there like a cloud. At an afternoon breakout session that same day, opportunity was given for the much smaller audience to ask questions. I raised my hand and distilled the two issues from the morning service into a single question. It started with, "What did you mean this morning when you said...?" Dr. Anderson chuckled slightly and said, "Why don't we start off with something a bit more controversial?" That remark evoked a polite titter that went through the room.

To the issue of attending the Mass and luching the Priest, there was not one doctrinal/Scriptural reason given as to why we should open up new relations with Rome. I asked whether it was a prelude to personal evangelism or something more. "We have much more in common with the Catholic Church than we have different" he said, and "Where would the Evangelical Church be on the question of abortion without the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church?" These remarks were followed by another chorus of low-keyed "amens" that moved across the audience. What does that have to do with anything? His "PE" of the church of Rome was completely pragmatic and political, and not based upon the Scriptures or church history whatsoever.

The second part of his answer was no better. When he began to address the homosexual question he remarked rather off-handedly, "Well, when you have people who are born with something that they can't control..." and then went on. Later in the same statement he appealed to the compassionate hearts of our pastors when he said, "Which one of you, having a lesbian couple in your church with children, would counsel them to separate? Think of the affect it would have on the kids!" I nearly fell out of my chair! Why was I so flabbergasted? Not because some outside guest speaker said something that is obviously outside the witness of Holy Scripture as well as Assemblies of God doctrine, but because he went unchallenged both during or after the council by our District leadership! As Leith Anderson (the leader of the largest contingent of evangelical Christians in America) gave "active endorsement" to both Roman Catholicism and homosexuality, our leaders gave "PE" to Anderson by not challenging his remarks (even weeks after the fact). Regrettably, the sessions were not recorded so we will have to settle for eyewitness reports that (as you know) are always subject to questioning and appeals to "misunderstanding".

Following the question and answer session I was met out in the hall by men who made remarks to me such as: "You radical!" and "Hey! Way to go brother troublemaker!" There were others though, those who were genuinely stirred and troubled; who thanked me for asking my question in public. When I broke my silence via e-mail approximately one month after the council, District Superintendent Bill Leach (one the kindest and gentlest men I know) replied simply:

"I suspect most all of our ministers who were in attendance understand that Leith Anderson is not an Assemblies of God minister. He was not representing our position in answering your question only his own. He was invited to discuss leadership and his example of church planting. I don't believe any public response from the District Office is needed (e-mail dated Thursday, June 15, 2006)."

In my e-mailed reply I wrote:

"Thanks so much for your reply! I knew what the essence of your answer would be, but appreciate having it in print. I have echoed the spirit of it to those who have raised the question with me, and will continue to do so. I just know that if I had a guest speaker at the Embassy (the church I lead), and he made those same statements to my home crowd, I would be answering many e-mails and phone calls

clarifying the fact that I did not agree with what was said. Accidental endorsement is one of the greatest challenges we face today.

Be blessed and we'll see you soon,

Jeff (e-mail dated Friday, June 16, 2006)"

Do you see the dynamic of "PE" at work? Anderson's original comments were made in a larger audience during a plenary session of the Council, and the question I raised was not (and could not be) asked until later that day. The fact that Superintendent Leach said that "He (Anderson) was not representing our (AG) position in answering your question only his own" is exactly why I'm writing this article! My question was a challenge to his uncontested statements made to the entire District Council while in session, and was not asked merely to satisfy my own curiosity! In retrospect, I guess that I should have followed up with another question directed at our leaders, asking for clarification of our District's convictions on the same issues. It seems horribly petty, but undefined silence that assumes a position is yet another trait of this "PE" dysfunction.

Following the District Council, could there have been some kind way of communicating our position without denouncing everything said by Leith Anderson? I believe there was. As in our example of Dan Betzer and his story about Tony Campolo, "Qualified Endorsement" could be employed. For instance, Superintendent Leach could've stated in the June or July minister's letter:

My fellow ministers of the Michigan District,

What a glorious Council we enjoyed this past month! The Lord visited us in a powerful way in each worship service, and we were challenged by our guest speakers as well. Dr. Leith Anderson shared many inspiring testimonies of how his church body in Minnesota has parented several new congregations over the past ten years. Though we as the Assemblies of God do not hold to his views relative to the Roman Catholic Church or biological predisposition as the cause for homosexuality, I was personally challenged to pray for truly Spirit-inspired ways to reach out to our surrounding communities with the power of the Gospel!

Sincerely,
Superintendent Leach

Do you see? Scriptural orthodoxy is preserved while charity is extended! I believe that since the exposure and potential for controversy at the Council was small in this case (remember that the workshop had few attendees and was not recorded), it was decided to just let sleeping dogs lie. However, there were other leaders affected by this famous pastor's comments that did not have the opportunity to speak up in public, or were afraid of being labeled a "troublemaker". My prayer is that none of our Michigan Pastors went home and put Anderson's example into practice. In fact, I hope that they follow in the steps of another Anderson who was in attendance at this Council; Dr. Gordon Anderson, President of North Central University in Minneapolis, MN. He recounted (in another session) that when he was approached by a group of homosexual activists demanding access to NCU's campus, he stood his ground and would not bend to their attempts at intimidation which included the threat of using local television and print media. Over in St. Paul however, Dr. Leith Anderson opened the campus of Bethel Seminary to "dialogue" with the same group. I am thankful and proud to call NCU my alma mater when this sort of courageous leadership is modeled for the next generation of AG leaders. My heart-felt prayer is that they will still have a courageous movement in which to serve after emerging from their college studies.

This reference to academic leadership brings me to my final example of "PE", as well as the question as to whether or not it is actually passive at all. Early on in our discussion the names Brian McLaren and Leonard Sweet were mentioned. You no doubt noticed that they resurfaced again when we examined Dan Betzer's endorsement of Tony Campolo. Why should any Assemblies of God ministers care about what these men outside the parameters of our movement think about anything? The answer to this question is that they keep showing up in Assemblies of God circles, and are cited as authorities that should be respected and listened to. Dr. Earl Creps, PhD, professor at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary and author of Offroad Disciplines, a highly esteemed work on ministry in the postmodern/emergent era, is yet another example of a leader that fails to clearly present and defend (with Scripture) his positions. Instead, names and concepts are thrown about, being incrementally introduced into the bloodstream of seminary students and by extension, into the entire body of our fellowship if left unchallenged.

Let's examine some of Dr. Creps' recommended readings from his course lists that he teaches around the United States as well as at AGTS in Springfield, MO.

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Continuing Education Course

2 or 3 Credit Hours

PTHE 640 MINISTRY ON THE EDGE:
THE MISSION TO POST-CHRISTIAN AMERICA
COURSE SYLLABUS
COURSE DESCRIPTION

Ministry on the Edge: The Mission to Post-Christian America is a class/conference partnership hosted by aGts in cooperation with the

Rocky Mountain District Council of the Assemblies of God. It will be the site and the raw material for theological reflection on our emerging culture and the kind of church that must emerge to engage it.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The course/conference is an arena for learning and growth of several kinds:

Cultural exegesis: understanding and interpreting major forms of cultural influence that are creating the context in which the Christian gospel must be lived out.

Theological reflection: hearing culture as posing critical theological questions and exercising the reflective skills needed to begin the process of developing meaningful answers.

Personal reframing: seeing personal and corporate communicative ministry as an evolving, holistic, missional calling rather than a set of static roles played by executing a list of functions.

Professional networking: developing relationships with other leaders devoted to the challenge of communicating the gospel in emerging culture in an environment that maximizes long-term peer learning.

Ministry enhancement: growing in the character, skills, and gifts associated with effective ministry to emerging culture.

COURSE READINGS

(Note: Call Arlene at 1-800-467-aGts x1055, or email her at adilley@aGts.edu)

Sweet, Leonard, Brian McLaren and Jerry Haselmayer. A is for Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003. (338 pages)

_____. Carpe Manana: Is Your Church Ready to Seize Tomorrow? Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001. (208 pages)

_____. Postmodern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century Church. Broadman & Holman, 2000. (224 pages).

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

www.aGts.edu

PTH 620 MINISTRY IN EMERGING CULTURE

(3 Credit Hours)

Fall 2003

Earl G. Creps 1-800-467-aGts

<http://www.agts.edu/faculty/creps.html> ecreps@aGts.edu

COURSE SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the potential of Pentecostal ministry in a rapidly evolving, globalized culture. The focus is on learning to discern culture as opportunity for cooperating with the mission of Jesus, and for discerning ministry as opportunity for Spirit-empowered expressions of that mission.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The course is an arena for personal growth of several kinds:

Character development: humbling ourselves as the Spirit uses the twin instruments of culture and ministry to form greater dependence on God in our hearts.

Cultural exegesis: interpreting major forms of cultural influence that are creating the context in which the Christian gospel must be communicated.

Theological reflection: hearing culture posing critical theological questions calling forth the reflective skills needed to develop meaningful answers that are true to Scripture and connected to context.

Personal reframing: seeing personal and corporate ministry as an evolving, holistic, missional calling rather than a set of static roles played by using power to execute a list of functions.

Community formation: relating to other believers in a community that simulates the way field ministry struggles to connect ministry with its context.

Ministry enhancement: discerning opportunities to cooperate with the Spirit in the fulfillment of Christ's mission in culture.

Ongoing growth: equipping with self-sustaining field research skills that can feed experience and insight into all of the objectives above in future ministry.

COURSE READINGS

Required Readings:
Sweet, Leonard. Soul Tsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture. Grand Rapids:
Zondervan, 1999. (446 pages)

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Doctor of Ministry Elective

June 3-7, 2002

PTH 971 MODELS OF MINISTRY IN THE EMERGING CHURCH

Earl G. Creps, Ph.D. Summer 2002

ecreps@agseminary.edu 1-800-467-AGTS

COURSE SYLLABUS

COURSE DESCRIPTION

A discovery and understanding of the variety of ministry models developing in the
emerging church.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The course is an arena in which four kinds of personal growth are catalyzed:

Knowledge Growth...

1. The nature of emerging culture in North America and the world
2. The variety of ministry models arising to engage this culture
3. The centrality of mission to the life and work of the church

Attitude Growth...

1. That there are multiple ways to accomplish the mission of the church
2. That discovery is the most powerful way to experience truth
3. That theology, spirituality, apologetics, etc. are no longer distinct categories

Character Growth...

1. The humility required to learn from the experiences of other leaders
2. The openness to grasp the radical changes taking place in culture
3. The willingness to take chances in order to fulfill the mission of the church

Skill Growth...

1. Learnings that facilitate re-examining the assumptions of our ministry
2. Sensitization to the role of culture in determining ministry strategy
3. Renewed confidence in the supernatural dimension of ministry

COURSE TEXTBOOKS

Required Texts

McLaren, Brian D. More Ready Than You Realize: Evangelism as Dance in the Postmodern Matrix. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.
(188 pages)

Sweet, Leonard. Postmodern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century Church. Broadman & Holman, 2000. (224 pages)

When reading Offroad Disciplines, it becomes quickly apparent that Dr. Creps' purpose is not to merely connect with and critique this present generation in the eternal light of Scripture and call it to Christ, but rather to call the Church to repentance from its sin of irrelevance, and to conform it to the thought patterns of this present age. Paul was considered "irrelevant" by the Athenian Philosophers when he preached the truth of the resurrection of Christ, just as he was judged to be out of step with the demands of occult leaders in Philippi.

The Word of God records in 1 Corinthians 1:18-21 an accurate diagnosis of the pseudo-wisdom of both the ancient as well as "postmodern/emergent" ages:

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." 20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

Let us remind ourselves at this point of the main thesis of this essay; the influence of "PE" is permeating every level of the church, not just the Assemblies of God. If Dr. Creps is not debating the outlandish teachings of figures such as McLaren and Sweet in his lectures, then by default he is incorporating their philosophies into his overall message, and thus into the minds of our future leaders. I can hear the defensive cry arising from a sincere AGTS (Assemblies of God Theological Seminary) scholar, "You don't know what you're talking about! You've never studied under Dr. Creps so you cannot possibly know his heart or what he talks about in his lectures". I sympathize with this defense. However, as a public figure who writes extensively and is held up as an example of present leadership in the Assemblies of God, he cannot claim a defense that is reserved for a low-profile Sunday School teacher with no audience outside of a handful of eleven year old boys. "To whom much is given, much is required" is a fitting proverb that applies to one who has been given a national platform. Where is the chapter in his book that repudiates the unscriptural positions of some of his favorite "cutting edge" leaders (McLaren, Sweet, etc.)? "PE" strikes again! Is it any wonder that some of our foundational doctrines and practices within the Assemblies of God are slowly fading, when we are incorporating (without critical debate) the teachings of many who do not hold to

Scriptural AG values, considering them to be irrelevant?

Can you imagine Paul saying to the Galatian Church? At this year's council we're going to hear from the Judaizers from Jerusalem. I know that circumcision and the compulsory observance of the Law of Moses is not our OFFICIAL DOCTRINE, but just eat the meat and spit out the bones." He didn't dialogue with the synagogue rulers, but rather engaged them in open and honest debate so that hypocrisy would not spread, and that the true message of the Gospel would not be confused or discredited. In fact, if you read Galatians 2 you will see that Paul confronted Peter himself to his face... in public, because of the confusion and hypocrisy he was causing with his "PE" of the Jewish leaders sent from Jerusalem, along with the betrayal of his Gentile Christian Brothers. Today we are passively led (an oxymoron) to let the Judaizers preach from our pulpits, dialogue with them to find consensus, and then if questioned simply sidestep the issue by saying that the false teachers are not "officially with us", and leave it at that. None of the Apostles were timid when it came to marking those who had different ethics or doctrinal views of the church! What of Paul's open reference to Hymenaeus, Philetus, and Alexander; or John's reference to Diotrephes? These narrow-minded Apostles of Christ would definitely have a difficult time fitting into our tolerant, global community... good for them; and woe to us!

GLOBAL UPDATE 7/07!!!

Please forgive this last-minute intrusion into our discussion; but sometimes new developments present themselves on a daily basis, even before I can complete one article. Just this week (July 2, 2007) I received two e-mailed newsletters that both stated that they represented the Global Pastors Network and the Billion Soul Initiative. The first was from Assemblies of God Evangelist James (Jimmy) O. Davis, who was gushing over the effort to bring in the second billion souls, thus fulfilling the Great Commission given by our Lord in Matthew 28:18-20. In his newsletter he invited all "global leaders" to a "congress" to be held in Atlanta, GA. Amazingly, in the same batch of e-mail I received one from Dr. John Maxwell, also in the name of the Global Pastors Network and the Billion Soul Initiative. In Maxwell's epistle he spoke reassuringly to his readers that James O. Davis had resigned his position as President of the GPN (a fact confirmed by Davis in his letter as well), and in no way represented the network, nor ITS Billion Soul Initiative. Before I go any further, I'll let you see both e-epistles for yourself.

June 22, 2007
IN THIS ISSUE:
Birth of a Vision
A Pastor-Led Initiative
Our Beliefs
Let's Get Motivated!
Our Invitation
Forward this email
www.BILLION.tv BILLION SOUL INITIATIVE™
Continuing Together to Win the Second Billion

The Rise of Global Christianity: Today, the three countries with the most unchurched people on earth are China, India, United States.
Together, let's help win the Second Billion!

The New Face of Christianity: Pastors David Mohan in India and Sunday Adelaja in Ukraine help lead the Billion Soul Initiative globally.

#January 29-31, 2008
Mt. Paran Church, Atlanta #Dear World Class Leader,
Billion Soul Greetings!

You are an important part of this global community of more than two million leaders who receive the Billion Soul updates, from Fiji to Finland, from Australia to Antilles and from Malaysia to Morocco. We are collectively working together to bring the Second Billion to faith in Jesus Christ. Thank you if you are one of the hundreds who have already signed up for the SYNERGIZE! Pastors Conference January 29-31, 2008, in Atlanta.

Last February, I announced worldwide that I resigned from GPN effective January 31. I did so to invest my life fulltime in the Initiative over which Dr. Bill Bright and I prayed just eight days before he graduated. We had experienced close to three wonderful years together to launch the Initiative. We also formed GPN. It was my great privilege to have walked with one of the greatest men who ever walked the earth.

It seems like yesterday that air conditioners whined in the August heat of a Springfield, Missouri, summer while the buzz of 350 members of the General Presbytery came to a silent stop. The venerable General Superintendent rose from his Chairman's seat before the assembly. He motioned to another statesman to take the floor and, in an unprecedented gesture, to take the Chairman's chair.

#BIRTH OF A VISION
back to top
Bill Bright

& James O. Davis It was 2001, and Dr. Bill Bright was about to make the first public announcement of a brand new goal. To get to Springfield, he had flown on a private plane because of a debilitating illness. As he climbed the stairs, wheezing through oxygen tubes,

to sit in the chair that Dr. Thomas Trask vacated, the Presbyters broke the silence with a standing ovation for the greatest soul-winner of the modern era.

Just six months earlier, on a snowy February 18th at 2:30 in the afternoon, I left a meeting in that same building with a prayer in my heart for God's vision to be fulfilled. During the short drive home, the Holy Spirit whispered, "Call Bill Bright now and tell him what I have put in your heart." Grabbing my cell phone, I placed the call.

"This is James Davis," I told his assistant, "and this call is an 8.7 out of 10 on the Richter Scale." Within an hour, Dr. Bright called and asked, "James, what is on your heart?" I told him my burden for pastors worldwide. Through my evangelistic work, I had learned that more than 90% of all ministers worldwide have no formal education. Tens of thousands drop out of ministry each year. And nearly every week, I was with another great pastor, listening to the challenges he faced. This helped develop my love for pastors that I have to this day.

One month with many days of fasting passed. On a March day in San Bernardino, California, Dr. Bright and I met and a vision was born. In August, he announced publicly for the first time in Springfield that we were in partnership to help plant five million new churches for a billion soul harvest.

Here's the letter from John Maxwell:

Friday, June 22, 2007 | Important Message from Dr. John Maxwell.

Dear Friend

There seems to be some confusion among Christian leaders about the current role of James O. Davis in GPN and its Billion Soul Initiative. Let me clear this up. James O. Davis resigned as president last January and has no role with GPN or our Billion Soul Initiative. He does not represent GPN in any capacity.

Rev. Mark Anderson was asked by the board to serve as our president and was elected January 25, 2007. He is a gifted leader with 30 years of ministry experience. He has brought a new strategy and a new life to GPN as we move forward. He is a key leader in YWAM and has earned great respect among the different streams in the Body of Christ.

There has also been some confusion about our address and our web sites. We have only one address – P.O. Box 621206. This is used for all GPN and Billion Soul Initiative communication.

GPN has two official web sites – www.gpn.tv, which serves as our pastors library, and www.call2all.org, which is used for current updates, Congress schedule and Congress registration.

We only have one GPN Congress scheduled for early 2008. The North American Congress is scheduled January 29 – February 1 at Northland: A Church Distributed, in Orlando, Florida. We would love for you to attend and you may register at the www.call2all.org site.

In conclusion, I do not want to leave any confusion on this matter. I fully endorse and pray for and will continue to support GPN and its Billion Soul Initiative. Dr. Bright, who coined the words "Billion Soul," had a special calling from God to see the great commission completed.

Your friend,

John C. Maxwell
Chairman

I find it amazingly ironic that this Global Network that will, according to the GPN faithful, fulfill the Great Commission in our lifetime and usher in the return of the Lord Jesus; is being fought over by those that are both claiming rights to the legacy of its dead founder, Bill Bright. This whole drama reminds me of the tragic story of the contentious children of Boston Red Sox slugger, Ted Williams, squabbling over his frozen remains. Jimmy Davis testifies that he spent three years with Bright and had a last minute prayer summit with him just days before his "graduation" as he put it. Maxwell, on the other hand, is standing as the defender of the true apostolic succession of the current GPN board and its new "pope" Mark Anderson. I'm so glad that all parties involved are following the sage advice of their late mentor by "laying aside their logos and their egos" (the promotional mantra of the GPN). Surely we would never see a Global law-suit over the rights to Bill Bright's vision would we? That would most certainly be counter-productive in reaching the globe through a visible demonstration of unity in fulfillment of Jesus' prayer in John 17!

In fact, this past May when I attended the Michigan District Council of the Assemblies of God which was held in Shelby Township at the great Assembly there led by Pastor Phil Crist, there was a conspicuous amount of advertising in the lobby via plasma video screens. The looping announcement said that Pastor Sunday Adelaja, pastor of the largest church in European history, was going to be there at Lakeside Assembly for a special "Global breakthrough, impartation, something or other", and that everyone was encouraged

to attend. I had even received an announcement in the mail prior to Council notifying me of the same event. The thing that struck me was that it was under the auspices of the Global Pastors Network! Wow! Right after the Michigan District Council we were all invited to stick around for another few days of Billion Soul Initiative breakthrough. I know that as the leader of an autonomous local Assembly, pastor Crist was well within his AG Constitutional rights to have whomever he wanted in his church over the weekend following the Michigan District Council, and that the Michigan District has no “Official” relationship with the GPN (remember the famous Reinhard Bonnke luncheon of the summer of 2005 [read “When in Rome” @ www.michiganchristianembassy.com]). However, my question is then, why was evangelist and former GPN President James O. Davis given the floor during a breakout session of the Council to promote the upcoming Global weekend with Adelaja? The Michigan District must stand behind Jimmy Davis’s claim that he is the rightful successor to the mantle of Bill Bright’s Global, Billion Soul Initiative. Or perhaps we were just getting pulled into yet another “Passive Endorsement” that will, in the long run, just serve to create more confusion.

This also raises another question: what of the Assemblies of God General Superintendent, Thomas Trask, the “official” chairman over 25% of the Global Pastor’s Network training institute under the heading of “Spiritual Formation”? On which side of the debate does he find himself? Does he take an “official” position and stand with AG credential holder Jimmy Davis in his bid to succeed Bill Bright, or does he shrug off the entire controversy as just an unofficial “one of those things”? This is exactly the kind of quagmire I warned of when I wrote “When in Rome”, my article on the dangers of global ecumenism and ill-defined networks. Perhaps this little speed bump in the global road to the New Jerusalem will bring us to our senses and cause us to pull our GPS-GPN-SUV over to the side of the road and ask the Holy Spirit for directions to the true city “whose maker and builder is God”.

If anyone needs me, I’ll be in my obscure corner of Christ’s harvest field finishing a very inadequate sermon for a very insignificant crowd (by Global standards anyway). Please Lord Jesus, come quickly; we’re trying to take over again!

When to say When?

In conclusion, let me echo the question raised by my chapter heading: “When to say When?” There must come a time when those in leadership draw a line in the sand and say “this far and no further”. I have had personal conversations with men that I consider my friends, but with whom I could go no further on their chosen doctrinal or ethical path. I have great personal affection for them and their families and always will; but my pulpit will remain closed to them until they come into line with what they previously held as Truth. I am not referring to petty questions of Sabbath observance or the eating of meats, but issues of deep and far-reaching importance to the Gospel and the government of the church. As my local congregation worships together with other church bodies in our city (every first Sunday night of the month as well as other occasions), I uphold the convictions that are vital to my Pentecostal faith, while not breaking fellowship with other men of goodwill over issues of meats, Sabbaths, new moons; or even questions of pre, mid, or post Tribulation Rapture. All questions have been honestly asked and honestly answered, providing the believers of our city with a strong foundation of truth upon which to stand.

Such honesty is sorely lacking in many ecumenical circles, all in the name of tolerance and unity. “When to say When?” We must each prayerfully look to the Holy Spirit and His Scriptures for wisdom and strength when answering that question. I’ll pray for you and I hope you’ll pray for me as well as we all walk this “road less traveled”. Look to our Lord, look to our courageous Apostles, even look to the orthodox giants of Church history; just don’t look for leadership from those who aspire to cultural relevance and a place at the global table of tolerance and unity at any cost!

